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FBI Chiefs Accused in Letter Case

United Press International

Top FBI officials ordered a threatening letter written by Lee Harvey Oswald destroyed shortly after the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, The New York Times reported yesterday.

The Times said then-FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover "probably" was in on the decision, because the person who relayed the order to destroy the letter was one of his assistants who would not have acted except on Hoover's instructions.

The decision to destroy the letter was made at a meeing of top agency officials in Washington the weekend after Kennedy's death, the Times said, quoting "a source familiar with the meeting." It did not say who attended the high-level meeting or whether Hoover was there.

The existence of the letter was first reported earlier this month by the Dallas Times-Herald.

FBI director Clarence M. Kelley, in a statement, confirmedits existence and said there was evidence it had been destroyed. He said the letter, delivered to the FBI's Dallas bureau about 10 days before the President was killed, apparently warned investigators not to make further attempts to interview Oswald's Russian-born wife. It did not threaten the President.

The Times, however, quoted its source as saying the letter contained a threat to "blow up" the Dallas police department.

The letter was destroyed to avoid potential embarrassment to the FBI and not to hinder the investigation of Kennedy's death, the Times' source said.

He said an assistant to Hoover, who relayed the order to the Dallas FBI bureau, would never have directed the destruction of possible evidence except on Hoover's expressed order.